WHIRRAKEE

May 2013

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MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE BENDIGO FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

Bendigo Field Naturalists Club Inc.

Address for correspondence: PO Box 396, Bendigo 3552. Web address: www.BendigoFNC.com.au
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Office Bearers for 2012 - 2013

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Garden Convenor/Secretary	*position vacant*	
Hall Management	Maurie Lewis (assisted by Rob Moors)	0407 427179
Whirrakee contact/editor	Sabine Wilkens e-mail: s.wilkens@latrobe.edu.au	5443 2797
Co-editor	Gemma Candy	
Whirrakee mailing coordinator	Vanessa Richardson	
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Membership of the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club is open to all those interested in Natural History. The subscription rates are: Single $34; Family $40; Concession: Single $28.50; Family $34. *Whirrakee* subscription only is $34.

General meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month. The venue for General meetings is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High Street, Golden Square. The meeting starts with a 10 minute thing-of-the night natural history segment. The invited speaker starts at 8:00pm and meetings conclude with supper. The Annual Meeting is held in September.

Committee meetings are held on the third Wednesday of each month at 6:00pm. Members of the Committee are the Office Bearer listed above and the following members: Anne Bridley, Glenise Moors, Joy Clusker, Kerrie Norris, John Lindner.

Excursions are conducted regularly and are advertised on the diary page of the *Whirrakee*. The assembly point for excursions is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, unless otherwise specified. Several interclub field naturalist campouts are held every year.

The Bendigo Field Naturalists Club has one sub-group (the Fauna Study Group) and is actively involved in local conservation issues. An **indigenous garden** has been established around the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building. Working bees are advertised on the *Whirrakee* diary page.

Fauna Study Group: Chairman: John Burtonclay, Fadersons Lane, Mandurang (5439 5710)
Secretary: Bill Holsworth, 13 Nabilla Crs., Bendigo (5443 4063)
Equipment Officer: Maurie Lewis (0407 427179)
Regular fauna excursions take place most Fridays. See page 11 for details.

Bird Observing: Club members conduct regular bird surveys. Please contact Anne Bridley 5442 6188 or Glenise Moors 5439 6254 for details. Special bird observations should be reported to Anne Bridley 5442 6188.
To propose bird observing excursions please contact Kerrie Norris 5447 8017.

Front cover photo?...see page 2

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Vol. 34, No. 4, May 2013

Whirrakee takes its name from the Whirrakee Wattle (*Acacia williamsonii*), which is virtually endemic to the Bendigo region

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Authors are responsible for the accuracy of the information they use and also for any opinions expressed in their articles. Contributions should be posted or e-mailed to the editor at least two days prior to the last Wednesday of the month. They will be included as soon as possible after they are received, although space restrictions occasionally require shortening of articles or holding them over till the following edition of *Whirrakee*.

Articles in *Whirrakee* may be reproduced, but permission should be obtained from the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club, and acknowledgment should be given to the author and the Club. Some back issues are still available on request.

Editor's Note

There has been a flurry of excursion activities in the last couple of months and many reports and photos to illustrate them. This month we have the report from the Lake Eppalock boat trip and part of the Mammal excursion, the latter of which will spill over to the next edition. Photos from these occasions are getting better and better, but it's still better to be there! This month, the club excursion is to the Crosbie Nature Conservation Reserve – details are on the back page.

On a sad note, Diamond Hill Park had control burns recently and I was surprised to see how many trees, even some larger ones have fallen over or have died standing. Hopefully we get some soft rain soon to help those many stressed surviving plants there (and elsewhere).

Front page photographer: Joy Clusker

A grand old eucalypt – if you look closely, there are some children hidden in its crown! This tree was photographed in the Campaspe/Goorning area during the 'Walking Country' Family Nature Club excursion with Bambi Lees.

Short Notices

Central Murray Wetlands Community Advisory Committee.
North Central CMA is seeking a BFNC member to be a representative on this committee. You don't need any specific knowledge about wetlands, just an interest in providing community input into their management. You can contact Ben Goonan (0418140369) if you would like to know more.

Library Matters From Diana Collier
Books and periodicals
Have you looked at the periodicals in the book room recently? 38 titles of other clubs' activities, observations, special subjects, such as *Waders, Frogs, Mammals?*

...

And the 100 books in the new Display Cabinet in the main hall? Any item is for loan - just register the details of the item with your name and the date borrowed in the Loans Record book – in the book room.

The May Club Excursion is to the Crosbie Nature Conservation Reserve (between Heathcote and Toolleen) (see back cover)

April Excursion report: Mammals of the box-ironbark forests – Saturday 13 April
by John Lindner

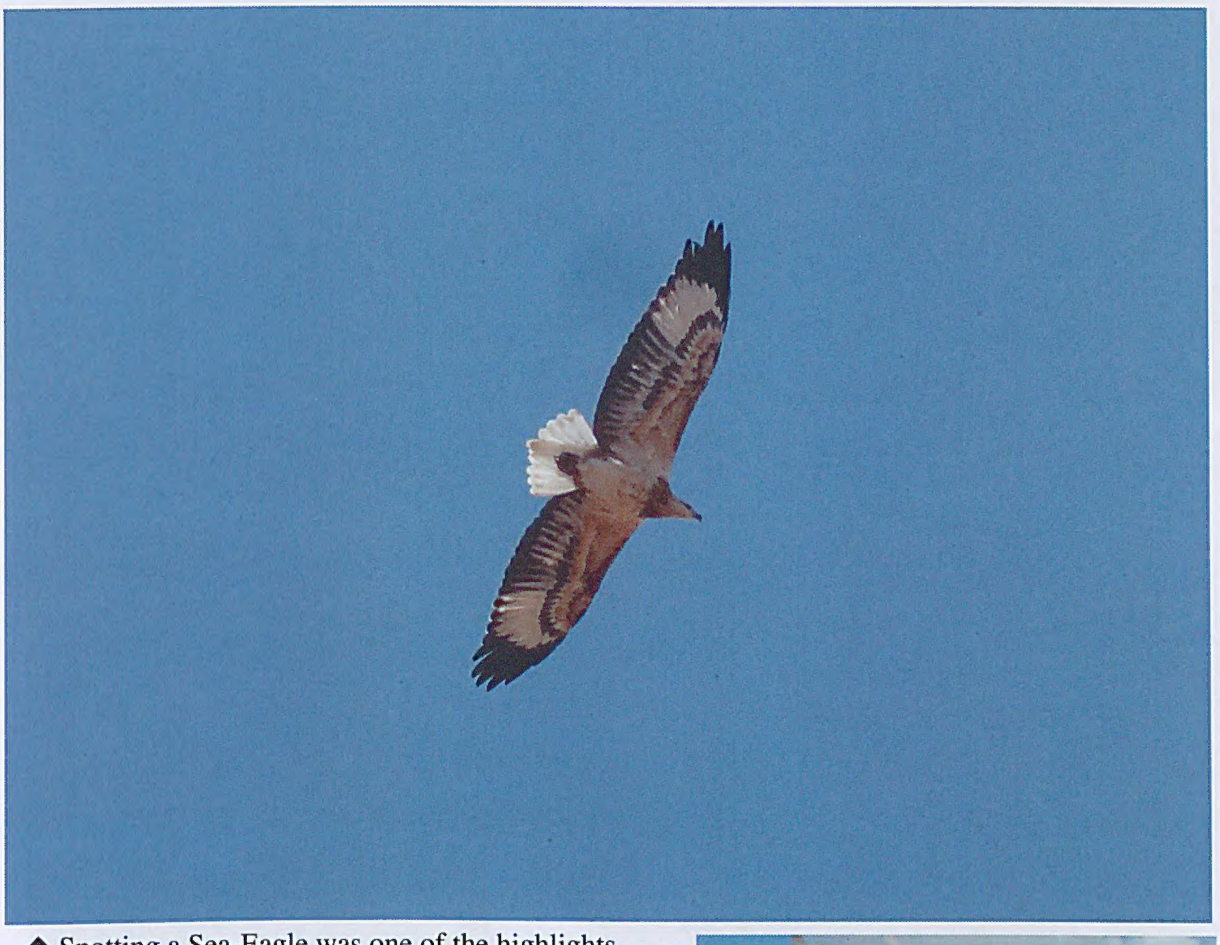
Leader: Kerrie Norris
Participants: Vanessa Richardson, Lyn Hamilton, Cynthia Watkins, Kate Lindner, John Lindner, Marian Hill, Joy Clusker, Kerrie Norris
Locations: Rosalind Park fernery (flying foxes) and No. 7 Park at Kangaroo Flat (arboreal mammals)
Weather: Warm and cloudy, with some indication that rain might fall

Our first location was the fernery at Rosalind Park in the middle of town. Since 2010, when the numbers of animals actually built up to a phenomenal 33,000 and occupied almost the whole of the park, Grey-headed Flying Foxes (*Pteropus poliocephalus*) have maintained a presence here. Now that they have successfully bred, this is likely to continue. The fernery is attractive as a roost site due to the large, old trees providing shade and shelter, and its centrality to important food resources. At the turn of the year, numbers were very low, but now have built up again. This can only be due to the availability of nectar and pollen in the surrounding forests. February to April is the time that the animals mate, and indeed we easily observed several acts of copulation. This seemed to be a pretty noisy and vigorous affair, with the male mounting the female from the rear and holding her firmly with his jaws. The colony was generally quite noisy and full of activity. We can expect the young to be born and observable in October-November. Kerrie provided a lot of information about these fascinating animals, and another article about them will appear in the next *Whirrakee*.

Our second location, at No. 7 Park, provided the opportunity to inspect artificial hollows in the form of boxes that had been placed in the trees to provide refuge for various nocturnal and arboreal mammals. To do this we used a special miniature camera lens with supplementary lights built into the end of a narrow probe which could be inserted into the entrances of the boxes (see photos on page 6). A black and white video picture was then received on a small computer screen, thus somewhat minimizing the disturbance to the animals. We did the rounds of 26 boxes. Nearly all them had the remains or the full structure of the typical spherical nest formed of green eucalyptus leaves, which are made by Sugar Gliders (*Petaurus breviceps*). However only two boxes actually contained a group of these rather endearing little animals. The significant thing is that the animals have at some time or other visited almost every box in the area, and left rudimentary or fully formed nests. Some of these latter may indeed have had concealed animals which we were unable to detect. Cont. on page 10

The distant and not to distant past – Images from Lake Eppalock excursion - 24th March

See page 8 for the report. Photos by John Lindner (Sea Eagle photo by Glenise Moors)



↑ Spotting a Sea-Eagle was one of the highlights

↑ Bill Holsworth beside a very large accumulation of debris left by the flood of mid-January 2011

A large log stranded in a tree in the lake as a result ➔ of these same floods

The causeway or ford made of basalt blocks in the bed of the Campaspe River.

Rob Moors at Gibbard's Yards , a very large basalt block construction

← The party at the boats at the very head of the Campaspe River.

Bottom left: Large anticlinal arch beside the lake ↙

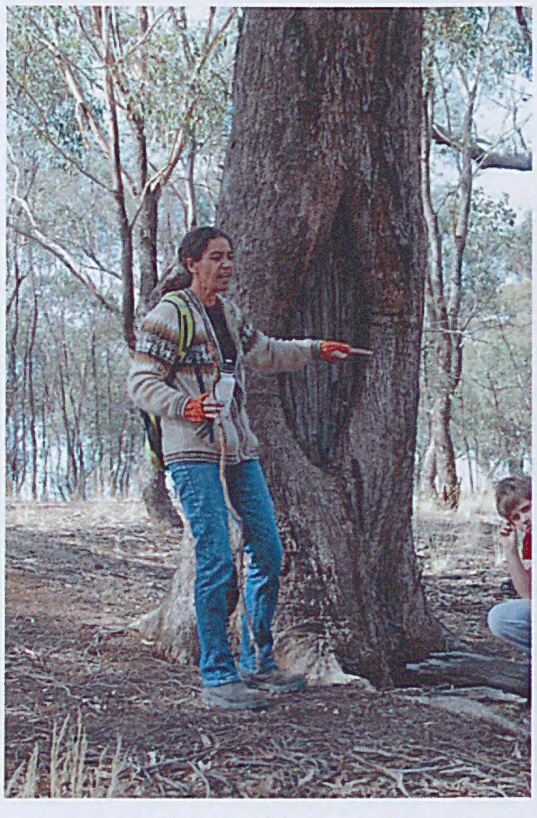
The ruins of Jasper's cottage. ↓

Mammal Excursion, 13th April (Photos by Cynthia Watkins)

See John Lindner's article on page 3. By the way, the BFNC has a fine collection of museum quality specimens of mammals and birds that members may like to access for closer study. Contact Bill Holdsworth (currently not available) or Kerrie Norris Ph. 5447 8017).

Watching sugar gliders without disturbing their sleep (No 7 Park, Kangaroo Flat)

Family Nature Club Activity: 'Walking Country' with Bambi Lees, April 21.
Photographs and text by Joy Clusker



...we looked at scar trees , water wells and cooking mounds, it was great for the adults as well as the kids.

Lake Eppalock and Campaspe River boat trip – Sunday 24th March

by John Lindner

Boat skippers: Tom Glynn, Maurie Lewis, Geoff Lewis
Participants: John Lindner, Kate Lindner, Carol and Bill Holsworth, Glenise and Rob Moors, Marie Handley, Marian Hill
Weather: Hot and sunny
Purpose of the excursion: You probably could not call this excursion a purely field naturalist one, whatever that means. Rather its aim was to examine the nature of human settlements and artifacts in the landscape within their natural history context. Once you understand the two aspects, you can see that there is considerable interaction between them. To a large extent, the latter determines the development of the former, even if you just start with the availability and use of raw materials (eg. basalt and sandstone for various constructions, timber). However the nature of the landscape also has an important influence on soils, grazing, crops, water supply, where buildings are sited and transportation routes. Although we are of course looking at a "modern" situation, below this is an incredibly interesting underlay from the nineteenth century, specifically the period following the gold rushes when the land became available for small settlers.

Trip summary
Our journey began with a 9 km boat trip, starting from the Point King boat ramp on Coliban Pool (where the Coliban River enters the lake), proceeding to Metcalfe Pool (where the Campaspe River enters) and up the lower reaches of the flooded Campaspe River valley. This river section becomes progressively narrower until you reach a point where the lake ends at a rocky bar. Although there was no water entering the lake due to the extremely dry conditions, upstream there were large clear pools of water, indicating that water was indeed percolating downstream through the sand and rocks in the river bed. On the way up, we disembarked and visited two sites, the first of which is quite significant and absorbed a couple of hours with lunch.

This first stop was "Flower Hill", a number of ruins and remnants of what was once a substantial farming enterprise. The farm was established by Lars Frederick Westblade in 1862 or 1863, as a result of the Land Acts passed by the Victorian Parliament, making it possible for people with little capital to select land from the squatters' holdings. Westblade was very active in local affairs and was President of the Shire of McIvor several times. He moved to the Kerang district in 1886, and died there in 1898. The actual ruins comprise a large sandstone stable or barn, a small bluestone outhouse or dwelling, the original sandstone house and the larger bluestone house on the cliff overlooking the river. Only the first of these is somewhat intact, with walls but no roof. The others now consist only of the lower walls or foundations, and the materials have probably been used to construct other buildings. Both the bluestone (basalt) and the sandstone (the same Ordovician origin rock we get around Bendigo) have been obtained from nearby. The ruins of the main house are surrounded by the remains of a wonderful garden, containing olives, medlars, lemons, oranges, cypress pines, Silky Oak, Pepper Trees, a Hoop Pine, a Bunya Pine and a Monterey Pine. On the edge of the cliff, there is a large clump of Agave cactus and some healthy Oleander plants. There is an impressive avenue of trees leading right down to the homestead: this is lined mainly with Elms but includes Spruces, Monterey Pines and Sugar Gums.

The second stop comprised the remains of a hut and garden established by a loner, George Woods, who lived here around 1900.

On the way between these human settlements, we viewed a very large example of an upwards fold or anticline in the Ordovician sediments (510 to 436 million years BP) (see photo on page 5). The curving of the strata in the hillside rocks reveals the huge fold of which this arch is the centre. The full supply

level of the lake reaches to the mouth of the arch. Further up the river, more examples of very thick, vertically inclined Ordovician sediments could be seen in the bank and adjoining hillside.

From the "end of the lake", we embarked on a 4 km walk, which took us to a number of interesting and notable historical sites, before returning to the boats:

McLennan's Crossing (see photo on page 5)
A curving ford in the river bed made of basalt blocks edged with wooden retaining beams.
Henry Jasper's cottage (see photo on page 5)
Henry Jasper took up 40 acres here in about 1868. His small house was built by a renowned local tradesman, Phil Vye, who specialized in stone buildings (Ordovican sandstone) using mud mortar. The cottage is still in good condition, although without a roof. The Jasper family experienced a terrible tragedy in 1868 when a young daughter died as the result of injuries received from boiling water. They subsequently moved to Mathoura.
Duncan McLennan's house site ruins
On the east side of the river, amongst a group of Monterey pines and Pepper Trees, are two sandstone chimneys. This is all that remains of the wooden house built by Duncan McLennan who called the property "The Pines". We were content to view this site from a distance.
Gibbard's yards (see photo on page 5)
Following the road up from the basalt crossing, and passing out of the sedimentary country to the almost level volcanic plateau created when lava filled a pre-existing river valley, you come to Gibbard's Lane. Here is a remarkable square yard constructed of basalt blocks quarried from the surroundings. We speculated that the yard was probably built to hold sheep at night before the advent of fences.
Gold mine shafts
On the steep west bank of the river are the remains of some very deep gold mine shafts. The remains of a stamping battery can still be seen. This site was occupied at one time by the Taafe brothers, Nicholas and George, who lived further up the hill.

Natural history
The natural history components of the day were quite varied:
• From the top of the hill above "Flower Hill", you can see the three dominant landscapes of this part of the world: Ordovican sandstone, Devonian granite (Mount Alexander), Miocene basalt.
• The inverted relief landform created as a result of lava flowing down the ancestral Campaspe River valley, filling it with several flows, and then solidifying with a more or less level surface. The Campaspe and Coliban river subsequently cut new courses around the edges of these obstacles to leave the flat-topped plateaus we see today.
• Vertical and curving strata of the Ordovician age sediments, visible both in the bank of the river and in the adjacent hillsides. Very large examples of the surfaces of sedimentary bedding, once horizontal, but now vertical, are also seen at a couple of places.
• The route of the flooded Campaspe River, now marked by parallel lines of drowned, large, old River Red Gums (*E. camaldulensis*), with many fine living trees on the banks.
• On the hillsides, fine specimens of very old, large Yellow Box (*Eucalyptus melliodora*) and Grey Box (*E. microcarpa*).
• Black Wallabies. A small population exists along the river amongst the remnant understory.
• A large variety of birds was seen on the lake, lower river and adjoining farm land and bush. The following bird list was provided by Glenise Moors:
Hoary-headed Grebe, Australasian Grebe, Darter, Little Pied Cormorant, Great Cormorant, Little Black Cormorant, White-faced Heron, Great Egret, Sacred Ibis, Pacific Black Duck, Grey Teal, Maned (Wood) Duck, Black Kite, Whistling Kite, White-bellied Sea-Eagle, Wedge-tailed Eagle, Australian Kestrel, Eurasian Coot, Crested Pigeon, Galah, Long-billed Corella, Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, Musk Lorikeet, Crimson Rosella, Eastern Rosella, Red-rumped Parrot, Owlet Nightjar, Welcome Swallow, Tree Martin, Blackbird, Grey Shrike-thrush, Restless Flycatcher, Willie Wagtail, Superb Fairy-wren, Weebill, Brown Thornbill, Yellow

Thornbill, Brown Treecreeper, Red Wattlebird, Yellow-faced Honeyeater, White-plumed Honeyeater, Brown-headed Honeyeater, Mistletoebird, Spotted Pardalote, Silvereye, Red-browed Finch, Common Mynah, White-winged Chough, Magpie-lark, White-breasted Woodswallow, Dusky Woodswallow, Magpie, Australian Raven, Little Raven.

From my point of view, a real highlight of the day was seeing the pair of White-bellied Sea-eagles in tall dead trees as we approached "Flower Hill" (see photo on page 4). There were numerous Darters, magnificent and somehow primitive-looking, along the route. On the return journey we finally saw a large flock of Little Black Cormorants, which I had expected. I have to confess I missed most of the other birds, but I was too busy playing mother hen to my own little flock of chickens.

Conclusion

This club trip was my fourth in 2 years. The others included a canoe reconnoitre with Alan Spence, a Bendigo Bushwalking and Outdoor Club canoe trip in March 2012 and a power boat reconnoitre with Tom Glynn. Prior to this, the BFNC had done this trip several times in the 1980s and early 1990s before the big drought. I have always found the history and natural history of this area quite intriguing – every time you go you find something different.It is rather special because it is largely untouched due to its relative inaccessibility.

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continued from page 3...

Some of these latter may indeed have had concealed animals which we were unable to detect. Only 3 boxes had absolutely nothing at all. The animals undoubtedly move around and are perhaps quite choosey about where they reside at any given time. It would be interesting to know why they are resident in particular boxes. One other box was occupied by a Common Ringtail Possum (*Pseudocheirus peregrinus*), which took us a little time to be sure that it was not a Common Brushtail Possum (*Trichosurus vulpecula*). I was particularly interested in the variety of trees, all of which were large, on which the boxes had been mounted:

Red Box *Eucalyptus polyanthemos*	4
Grey Box *E. microcarpa*	6
Yellow Box *E. melliodora*	7
Red Stringybark *E. macrorhyncha*	1
Monterey Pine*Pinus radiata*	8

Although an exotic, 7 of the pines had a leaf nest of some kind, and one had the Common Ringtail. I thought it was notable that native mammals were using these trees.

After the box inspection, we spent some time examining the collection of taxidermied mammal specimens, mostly prepared by Bill Holsworth. These included the animals we had actually seen (Grey-headed Flying Fox, Sugar Glider) as well as some very interesting others (Greater Glider, Tiger Quoll).

Late Notice...

Bendigo Creek Walk 'n' Talk

9.30 am Sunday 5 May 2013

Meet at Bendigo Botanic Gardens, White Hills.

Northern Bendigo Landcare Group will be joined by flora, fauna and river health experts, who will lead discussion throughout the walk to highlight the many threats and assets of the Bendigo Creek. At the conclusion of the walk, members of the Friends of Bendigo Botanic Gardens will provide information about redevelopment of the Gardens and their historical link with the Bendigo Creek.

Please note, this walk will require a reasonable fitness / endurance level for a walk of several kilometres over mildly challenging terrain. The walk will take approx 2.5hrs

Bookings were essential (by May 1) – but ring Nicole Howie anyway, to see if you can still attend, on 5448 8244 or e-mail Nicole at dnhowie@bigpond.com>

Diary

All Club meetings are held at the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High St Golden Square, unless otherwise indicated.

Wednesday May 8 **7.30pm**
Associate Professor Alan Lill
School of Biological Sciences, Faculty of Science, Monash University. Alan's title is "Urban invasion by native and exotic birds"

Wednesday June 12 **7.30pm**
Dr Michael Weston, Senior lecturer, School of Life and Environmental Sciences, Deakin University will talk about 'Little Ravens as predators and adaptations of prey'

Excursion – Sunday May 12

Attractions: Austral Grass-trees, birding, big trees
Location: Crosbie Nature Conservation Reserve (between Heathcote and Toolleen).
Date/Time: Sunday 12 May, 9 am to 4 pm.
Leader: Anne Bridley
Meet: 9am at BFNC clubrooms
Walking: up to 1 1/2 km at a time
Driving: note that some of the tracks in this forest are rough and unsuitable for low vehicles. Total distance is about 110km.
What to bring: binoculars, plant field guides, sturdy footwear, lunch, morning and afternoon tea

We will be looking at various ecological vegetation classes in a forest, which is in much better condition than some closer to Bendigo. These different vegetation communitiees reflect variations in topography and soils and provide some surprises. The birding is excellent, with many small insectivores. There are terrific old hollow trees as well.
This block of forest is mainly Box-Ironbark Forest, but the understorey in some places is a little different than that closer to Bendigo.
There are also some small patches of Heathy Dry Forest, Hillcrest Herb-rich Woodland and Alluvial Terraces Herb-rich Woodland.

Regular Fauna Excursions
Every Friday morning starting at around 9 to 9:30 the Fauna Group inspects nest boxes in the Spring Gully area. The excursions are led by Maurie Lewis, 16 Vains St. Golden Square. Phone 0407 427 179. Phone Maurie to confirm exact departure times and location. If you don't phone and go directly to Maurie's house and find nobody at the house between 9 and 9:30, then the excursion is not on.
It may be that these excursions are coming to an end. Make sure you ring Maurie if you'd like to go along. A report of a recent excursion will be in the next *Whirrakee*.

Family Nature Club
Unless we will get lots of rain in the next week or so, it will be too dry for the originally planned fungal excursion. Plan B is looking for evidence of our glacial past at Lake Eppalock. Can anybody who intends to help out let Jan Orr know?

Registration:
Bendigonatureclub@gmail.com or 5443-1326
Check out their 2011 and 2012 activities at http://bendigofamilynatureclub.blogspot.com/

Bendigo Native Plant Group meeting.
All interested people are welcome to come along. Meeting starts at 7:30pm on the third Tuesday of the month, Golden Square Senior Citizens Hall.
Next meeting: 21st May.

Wildlife Rescue & Information Network Inc.
W.R.I.N. is an organisation dedicated to the care of orphaned, sick or injured native animals. It is fully endorsed by the Dept of Sustainability and Environment.
Please call our Emergency Number for Help for Fauna in Need. Phone: 0419 356433.

Mapping great change: The landscape of Victoria – 22nd March – 16 June
Post Office Gallery, 51-67 Pall Mall, Bendigo